



Bridgewater Review

Volume 38 | Issue 1

Article 7

4-2019

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Recommended Citation

Bellafore, Margaret (2019). “Global” on the Rose Kennedy Greenway. *Bridgewater Review*, 38(1), 22-26.
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol38/iss1/7

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Photos from the author's participation in Transactions 2, an artist exchange between Mobius artists in Boston and Bbeyond artists from Belfast, Northern Ireland. Bellafiore's performance, "Global," consisted of drawing along the Rose Kennedy Greenway path with powdered chalk. She selected animals vulnerable to increased temperature due to the heating up of the planet. When each drawing was complete, she attached the chalk bag to herself. (Photo Credit: Jordan Hutchings)

“Global” on the Rose Kennedy Greenway

Margaret Bellafiore

Some people don't believe in global warming. How do you stay calm in the face of an impending, unprecedented global apocalypse?

Drawing does it for me. Lots of concentration. Focused hand/eye coordination. Observing. Measuring. Almost a meditation of sorts. How to make a drawing beautiful and even real? My intention for “Global,” a public performance on the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston was to lure passersby with my drawings. I had selected samples from the 80,000 plant and animal species that could be lost without a climate policy to reduce global temperature. I hoped to engage people in a conversation about climate disruption.

Ten years ago, I had done similar drawings as an indoor installation in the Mobius gallery on Harrison Avenue in the South End. Mobius, where I am a member, is a nonprofit, artist-run organization, whose mission is to generate, shape and test experimental art. At that reception, two scientists from the Union of Concerned Scientists spoke about climate change. They were optimistic as all the solutions were in their 2007 “A Report of the Northeast Climate Impacts Assessment.” In their chapter on “Coastal Impacts,” they

predicted the flooding of New York City by hurricanes like Sandy. Their maps exactly described what actually did happen, seven years ahead of time. The forecasts for Boston were (and are) dire. Did anyone notice? Well, I naively thought we had more time. I was wrong. The impacts of climate disruption are now happening faster than scientists expected.

This time, I would draw on the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston. But this time, my thinking about my responsibilities had changed. When the Spectra/Enbridge gas corporation came to town (Weymouth), I connected the dots. We had to use less fossil fuels, not more. I became an activist protesting the Atlantic Bridge project of the largest fossil fuel corporation in North America. This multi-state pipeline project for the export of fracked methane runs from the fracking wells in Pennsylvania north to the Maritimes and through a proposed toxic gas compressor station to be built



(Photo Credit: Jordan Hutchings)

in the Fore River Basin. I became a founding member of the Fore River Residents Against the Compressor Station (FRRACS).¹

I began my first image near the Greenway entrance at the corner of Purchase and Congress Streets. I poured white powdered chalk from a paper cup. I was reminded of the amazing engineering feat of the “Big Dig” as the Greenway is the land above the underground tunnel that now contains the former above ground Central Artery highway. Could an effort as large as that be applied to start confronting the enormity of climate change?

I was nervous drawing with people watching. Public performance art puts me in a weird space because what I am doing is not considered “normal.” When I am willing to tolerate this weirdness, I find I create a zone for myself to find answers and for viewers to see things in a different light. This was not a “guerrilla action.” We had permission from the Greenway Conservancy as part of an artist

Activist Bill McKibben’s mantra is “winning slowly on climate change is just another way of losing.” He urges that “we have to move fast, possibly faster than we know how.”

exchange with five Bbeyond artists of Northern Ireland and five Mobius (Boston) artists.

Would my first drawing even look like the North Atlantic cod? A week before, I had practiced in my friend’s driveway.



(Photo Credit: Jordan Hutchings)

¹ Please see www.nocompressor.com



(Photo Credit: Jordan Hutchings)



(Photo Credit: Jordan Hutchings)

(That night she had called to say the cod was glowing in the dark. How could that even happen?) I made long sweeps of powder forming the outline and gradually the cod materialized. A woman stopped and asked, “What are you doing?” She really meant to say,



(Photo Credit: Jordan Hutchings)

“Why are you doing this?!” I asked if she liked to eat cod and we wound up chatting about the carved wooden “Sacred Cod” hanging in the Boston State House from colonial times. I calmly kept drawing the details while saying that the cod’s decline is not due

Turtles are also confused by the temperature increase in waters off Cape Cod. Do they go north to go south? Volunteers rescued hundreds of stranded turtles on Wellfleet beach in December 2018. They rode in the back seat of cars up Route 3 to the Aquarium hospital in Quincy with the windows wide open to stay cool.

to overfishing but because the young cod larvae cannot find the crustaceans they eat to survive. The young starve to death because the crustaceans don’t reproduce when water temperatures go higher than 47° F. I did not mention that the Georges Bank this year reached

61.5° F. I only wanted to keep it as light conversation for the few minutes I had with her. After she had left, I finished the drawing, put the paper cup in a cloth bag and pinned this bag onto the front of my sweater. The bag had a



(Photo Credit: Jordan Hutchings)

North Atlantic cod drawn on it with a black marker.

I moved up the path lined with flowering shrubs maintained scrupulously by horticulturists at the Greenway Conservancy. I had been “vetted” in order to use calcium carbonate on the path. (I had received an emphatic “no” for my request to use colored sand.) The moose drawing was next. I made swirls of white powder establishing a moose on the pathway with huge antlers between its ears. I enjoyed pouring out arcs of chalk defining the fourteen-point structure rising out of its head. A family stopped to watch me draw, mesmerized as the image gradually appeared. I told them I was surprised to find out that the moose population was being infested with ticks. The increase in temperature has caused an increase in the tick population. Tens of thousands of ticks gather on a single moose feeding on its blood. The moose immune systems weaken. This often ends in death, especially for the calves. Who knew heat would do this? I asked someone to pin the moose bag on my back. (Later in the day, a child

kicked apart the moose drawing. This only emphasized for me the fragility of these species.)

The golden frog was fun to draw. Was it the drought that killed them? Was it a fungus increased by hotter, drier temperatures? Scientists are not sure it was climate change alone. Anyway, those frogs are gone. They have not been seen since 1989. I attached another bag with the frog image for me to carry.

I had a long stretch of path to draw the beautiful Sierra Nevada blue butterfly. This is a displacement story as they live in the mountains of Spain. The snow cover is melting, forcing them to go to higher areas, which are not suitable for their survival. Going higher will lead to extinction. This feels like a cautionary tale for me, living on a peninsula, facing sea level rise and hurricane inundation. Go higher! Will I survive? The butterfly bag was also attached to my clothes.

I selected the orange spotted filefish to draw because it looks like no other fish. It eats a certain kind of coral, which is very sensitive to warm water. As the coral die off, the race begins. Can the

filefish “learn” to eat a different coral? Can they change their diet fast enough to outrun global warming? Can anyone? I carried one more bag.

I drew a whole lot of sea turtles moving together along the path. Their nests are vulnerable if the sand gets



(Photo Credit: Jordan Hutchings)



(Photo Credit: Jordan Hutchings)

too hot. The turtles are also confused by the temperature increase in waters off Cape Cod. Do they go north to go south? Volunteers rescued hundreds of stranded turtles on Wellfleet beach in December 2018. They rode in the back seat of cars up Route 3 to the Aquarium hospital in Quincy with the windows wide open to stay cool. I attached the sea turtle bag to my collection.

Drawing the snowshoe hare with white chalk was the perfect medium. Without the cold supporting snow, here is the race again. Can this white rabbit grow darker fur before they are killed by predators, easy targets on a snowless landscape? Another bag.

I drew the piping plover, the caribou, the salmon, the puffin, and the golden bower bird all racing to change habitat, diet, and reproduction (the salmon eggs won't hatch in warm water) before it is too late. Extinction.

Activist Bill McKibben's mantra is "winning slowly on climate change is just another way of losing." He urges that "we have to move fast, possibly faster than we know how."

I drew a large polar bear at the intersection of Pearl and Purchase Streets with the front paws hugging the red brick sidewalk. People crossing here are too busy to stop and chat with me, but they do look. The people here are not using the Greenway path but just cutting through it in a hurry. Everyone knows the polar bear situation—the "poster child" for climate change. What is it like to be stranded on an ice floe? Did the polar bears sense it was coming? Did they notice the quality of the ice changing as it was starting to melt? Could they do anything about it? Can we? Can I? I attached another bag for the Arctic polar bear.

The walrus is also facing the dangers of melting ice. Walrus need sea ice to travel over and as a place of rest. If they are in the water all the time, they use too much energy and then need more nourishment. Without the ice, they can't hunt for additional food and eventually starve to death.

And the ringed seal. They make snow dens on ice to protect their pups. If they can't, the pups die. I add two more bags.

My last drawing is at Oliver Street and it is a favorite for stuffed animal toys: the emperor penguin. Children love penguins. For thousands of years, there has been sea ice and now it is melting fast. Many penguins need sea ice to survive. They feed on krill that live under the ice sheets. Penguin eggs can't survive in a puddle. I make this drawing as large as I can and as perfect as I can with large sweeps of white line on the black gravel path. It looks good.

The next day it rained. Bankers and lawyers from the financial district on their lunch breaks saw only ghostly images on the pathway where the drawings had been.



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